



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### The bright lights of Alexandria, continued

*Alexandria Times, January 9, 2020*

*Image: Kennedy's motorcade in Alexandria, 1960. Photo/Paul Schutzer for Time Life Images.*

Joe Namath's wasn't the only career that had a memorable start at the George Washington High School football stadium. In terms of world history, John F. Kennedy's campaign stop there in 1960, shortly after receiving the Democratic Party's nomination for president, had greater resonance.

Kennedy's rally was held on Aug. 24 as part of a push to keep southern electoral votes. Accompanying the future president was his running mate Lyndon B. Johnson, who would later become president himself, along with Johnson's wife, Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson, and Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond.

Kennedy's speech started off as an acknowledgment of Virginia's contribution to the founding of the Democratic Party but focused on his differences from his opponent, Richard M. Nixon, in the area of foreign policy.

An estimated 15,000 people came to the G.W. High School football stadium, requiring the arrangement of buses from McLean and Seven Corners, the erection of a platform, special sound system and the installation of Klieg lights, which were used for television lighting.

Kennedy argued that under the Eisenhower and Nixon administration:

"Never before have we experienced treatment at the hands of our enemy. Never before have we experienced such a decline in our prestige, driving our friends to neutralism, and neutrals to outright hostility."

He dismissed Nixon's foreign policy experience of personal meetings with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev by asking listeners to point to one change in Soviet policy as a result of Nixon meeting with the Soviet Premier.

Kennedy contrasted his vision of the United States with that of the Republicans by saying voters should vote for the then vice-president if they liked "the previous eight years of nothing ever happens."

Another barb was:

"Mr. Nixon may be very experienced in kitchen debates. So are a great number of married men I know."

Among the rally participants were the Golden Girls, a group of young women volunteers who dressed in white dresses and straw hats who passed out campaign buttons. Most of the Democratic Party royalty of Virginia showed up for the rally, including Alexandria Mayor Leroy Bendheim, who cut short a vacation to Nova Scotia to lead the rally in the Pledge of Allegiance.





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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There was one notable absence: Virginia Senator Harry Byrd stayed in Washington that evening claiming that he hadn't decided who to endorse. Governor Almond would comment after the rally that he had never seen such enthusiasm in his time as a Virginia politician. Kennedy won the Democratic Party nomination despite questions about his experience at the tender age of 43. His rally in Alexandria showed his political power in the state and ability to unify the different factions of the party behind him. His speech, focused on the sometimes dry topic of foreign policy, nevertheless electrified the audience.

Despite the enthusiasm he generated in Alexandria, Kennedy lost Virginia by approximately six percentage points in the November 1960 presidential election.

*"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*